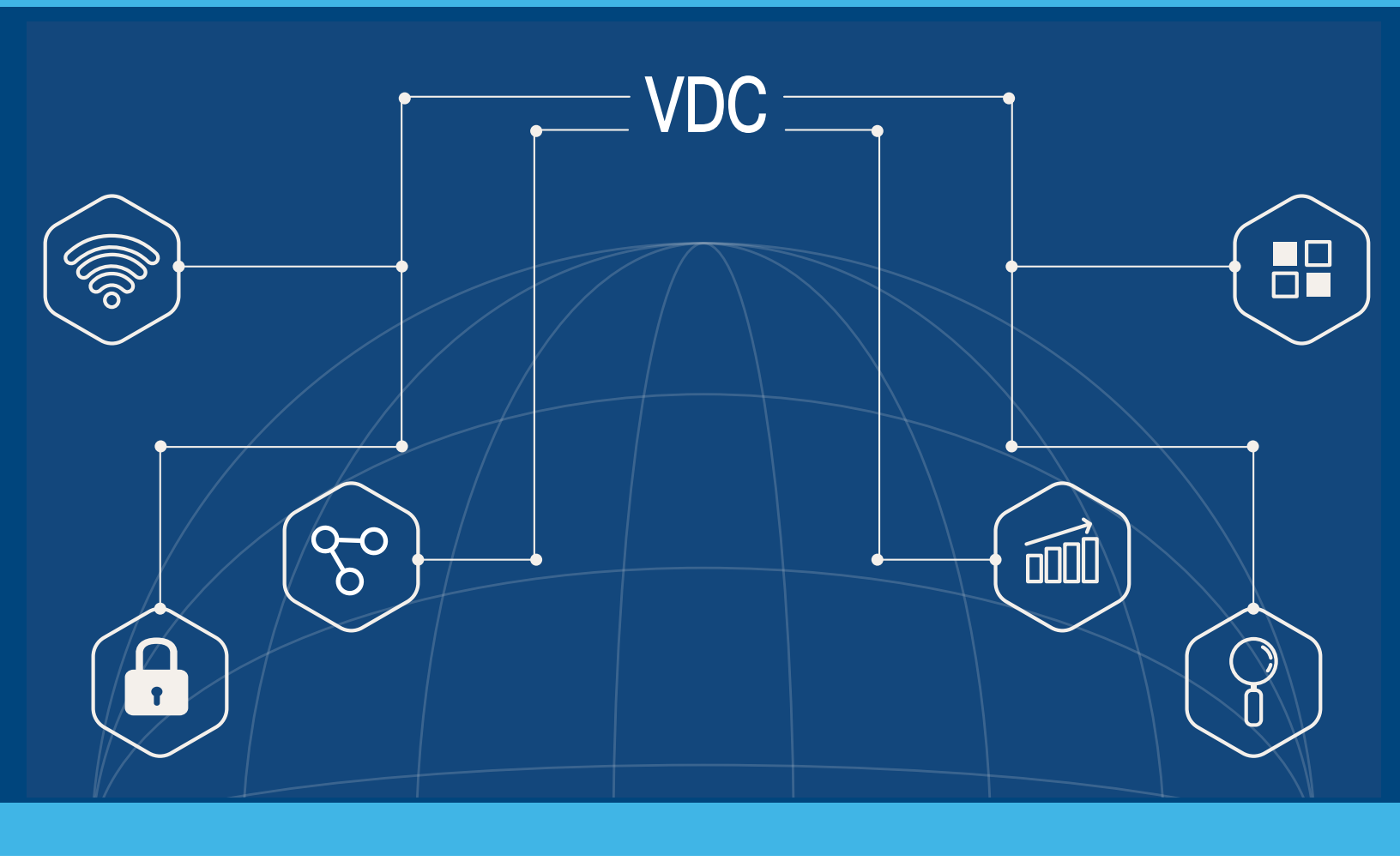
Modern Field Technician Mobility Requirements

Flexibility, Configurability and Predictive Insights are Key



VDC Research

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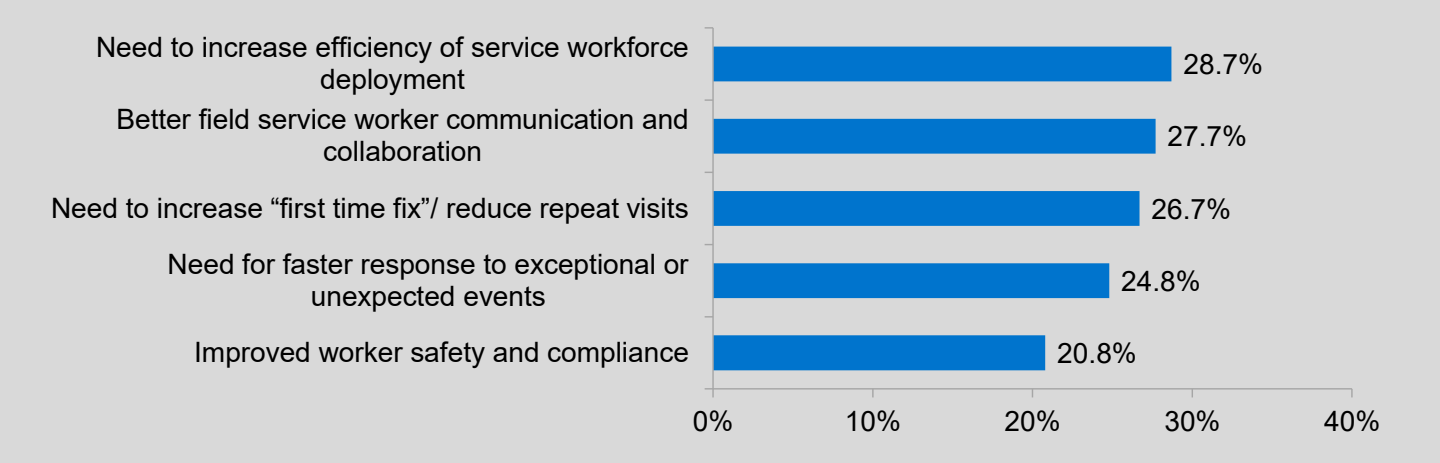
According to VDC Research's recent **2020 End User Buyer Behavior Survey**, the top priorities driving organizations' investments in mobile solutions for their service technicians are: to increase workforce efficiency, to improve service worker communication and collaboration, and to increase "first-time fix" rates (Exhibit 1). These leading mobility goals are not necessarily new or different for the sector from previous years, but they are increasingly emphasized as field service operations heavily ramp up their reliance on and deployment of mobile solutions to enhance operations.

Exhibit 1: What are the top priorities driving your organization's investments in mobile solutions for field service technicians? Select up to 3 most relevant.



Source: 2021 Enterprise Buyer Behavior Survey, VDC Research

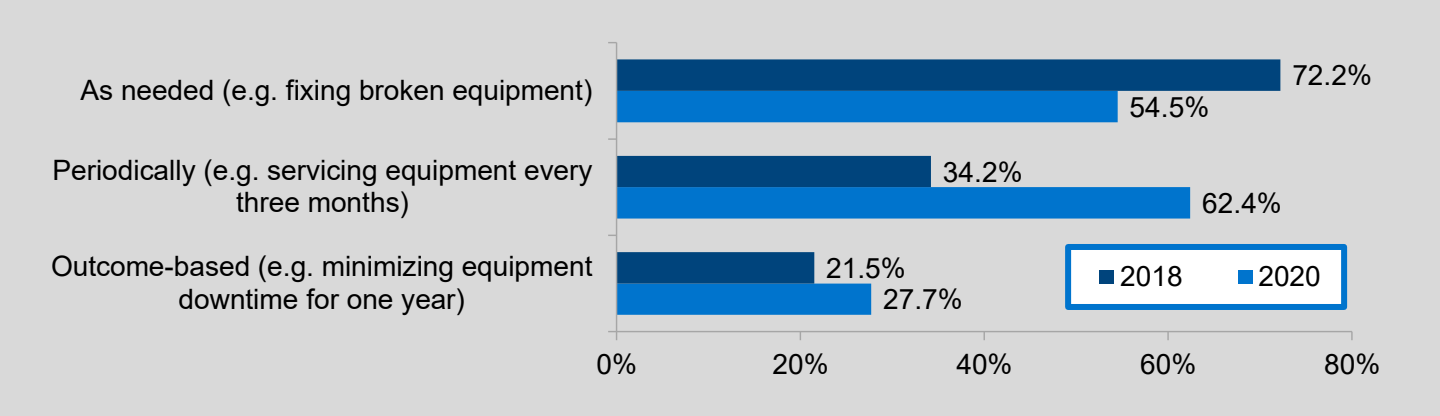
Not only are field service and maintenance operations deploying laptops, smartphones, and tablets to their technicians at rates of twenty to thirty percentage points higher than they were as recently as 2018, according to the survey, but the industry's response to COVID-19 sees it accelerating its rate of mobile adoption even more aggressively. This extreme influx of mobile tools at service technicians' disposal is of course a positive step for their productivity, safety and effectiveness, but it is also disruptive in terms of end user training and adoption readiness. The hyper-acceleration of mobility across service technician workforces puts a spotlight on a critical mobile solutions requirement – flexibility is key.

Two points of flexibility are most important to consider in this context: ease of use and configurability. Service and maintenance operations' rapid and widespread adoption of new mobile tools, in order to be successful, hinges on those tools' usability and intuitiveness. New technologies' flexibility – in terms of being smoothly introduced into their designated workflows, workforces and IT infrastructure – is necessary to minimize technician downtime, particularly because the primary goal of these tools is to increase efficiency and give technicians more wrench time back.

Mobile solutions' configurability requirements are partly rooted in evolving service technician workforce demographics. As aging populations of technicians work alongside their junior counterparts with expanding gaps of skill, experience and mobile preferences between them, it is increasingly important to offer a seamlessly collaborative variety of mobile form factors, interfaces and layouts, workflow options and more. A one-size-fits-all approach to mobile fleets is just not as effective. In VDC's *2020 End User Buyer Behavior Survey*, service technician stakeholders named the lack of a flexible technology infrastructure as their leading barrier to responding to COVID-19 more quickly, further stressing their need for configurability in the name of workforce agility and disruption preparedness.

Between field service and maintenance operations' top three mobile investment priorities to better workforce efficiency, improve workforce collaboration and increase first-time fix rates, there is a common thread beyond flexibility requirements that connects them to the sector's evolving service models. These operations are increasingly committing to more predictive, outcome-based service models (Exhibit 2). This shift in turn places greater pressure and demand on technicians to more frequently and quickly perform asset service and maintenance, making it all the more important for mobile deployments to enable the successful achievements of those goals with predictive, data-rich asset insights.

Exhibit 2: On what basis does your operation provide service and support?



Source: 2021 Enterprise Buyer Behavior Survey, VDC Research

Overall, service and maintenance operations optimizing their workforces with a flood of new mobile solutions moves the sector and its technicians in a positive direction with an elevated set of capabilities and visibility. Still, relevant stakeholders should approach these decisions with a cautious mindset to make sure they are putting the right tools in technicians' hands despite their peers' apparent rush to deployment – investments should be guided by a solution's ability to offer fleet flexibility and predictive asset insights above all else in order to best cater to the sector's prevailing priorities.

Vendor Spotlight

Infor EAM and Zebra Technologies

The synergy of the Infor Enterprise Asset Management solution on Zebra Technologies' portfolio of tested enterprise and rugged tablets and smartphones (with the L10 and ET5x series being some of the most prevalent in the service technician space) is one example of a mobile deployment in these environments worth highlighting. Together, these enterprise tools speak to the growing mobile requirements of usability, configurability and visibility that these work teams have.

For one, Infor EAM's new **Field Work app** is configurable to the technician's mobile preferences and tasks – the user experience can be customized based on what they need to see in the layout that they want to see it. With this configurability and usability designed to the end of increased effectiveness and efficiency, Infor finds that the technicians they support get 20% to 30% more wrench time back from time lost partly due to the cumbersome scrolling and searching for critical information they need on their devices.

Moreover, on the Field Work app, technicians and inspectors can open a highly detailed view of their work orders and requests that is searchable and sortable by a variety of parameters, such as task priority, and that is enriched with checklists, inventory data, in-depth reports, historical asset notes and documents, and data scanning capabilities. While in the field, no technician is left in need of the data that is imperative to their completion of the asset inspection or service task at hand. Infor also has a history of mobile, so its EAM solution is a natural mobile extension that considers the on-the-go workflows and work environments of the service technician end user – mobile usability is an inherent element. Still, user preferences extend beyond smaller mobile interfaces for a variety of tasks, so the Field Work app can be used on a desktop as well.

On the 10.1-inch **Zebra L10 Rugged Platform** – which can be deployed as slate tablet, a rigid-handled tablet with a built-in barcode reader, or as a 2-in-1 device with a full-featured keyboard – technicians and inspectors can leverage Field Work as a mobile or desktop-like experience on a device that is rugged, powerful, and fast enough to support their data-rich daily routines. Zebra's **ET5x Tablet Computer Series** offers users a thinner and lighter mobile computing experience where needed or preferred. Across these device options, users have access to a rich and configurable accessories ecosystem – vehicle mounts, docking solutions and hand straps, built-in scanner options, hot swappable batteries, cases, handles, shoulder straps and D-Clips – that caters to any field computing requirement.

Together, Infor EAM's Field Work app and the Zebra portfolio provide technicians and inspectors configurable and intuitive mobile ecosystem that is reliable and durable enough to support all-day field work, and these are some of the most important factors for industry decision makers and stakeholders to consider when outfitting a service technician workforce with a new fleet of mobile tools. Importantly, these solutions are also purpose-built for field work use cases, meaning they are designed to provide long-lasting support in the exact environments and workflows that they are deployed in.

About The Authors

Pat Nolan

Pat Nolan supports a range of syndicated research programs and custom consulting projects within VDC's Enterprise Mobility practice. His previous market research and consulting coverage includes enterprise communications and the MarTech space. Before that, he supported the marketing and communications efforts of a mobile healthcare solutions developer. Pat graduated from Syracuse University with a B.S. in Advertising and a minor in Information Management & Technology.

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David Krebs

David Krebs has more than 10 years of experience covering the markets for enterprise and government mobility solutions, wireless data communication technologies, and automatic data-capture research and consulting. David focuses on identifying the key drivers and enablers in the adoption of mobile and wireless solutions among mobile workers in the extended enterprise. David's consulting and strategic advisory experience is far reaching and includes technology and market opportunity assessments, technology penetration and adoption enablers, partner profiling and development, new product development, and M&A due diligence support. David has extensive primary market research management and execution experience to support market sizing and forecasting, total cost of ownership (TCO), comparative product performance evaluation, competitive benchmarking, and end-user requirements analysis. David is a graduate of Boston University (BSBA).

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About VDC Research

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